

*On March 11-12, 2014, CNCS hosted a Tribal Applicant Training in Washington, DC. Participants included federally recognized Indian tribes and tribal organizations who are current AmeriCorps grantees, planning grant recipients, unsuccessful applicants from the 2013 AmeriCorps grant competition and those who had expressed interest in applying for funding in 2014. This document includes the questions generated and provides updated responses.*

1. What was the percentage that was exceeded of the 1% tribal grants for 2013?
  - a. In 2013, AmeriCorps exceeded the 1% tribal set-aside by approximately 5%.
2. Is there a set amount of funding for which we can apply?
  - a. AmeriCorps does not identify a set amount of funding for which an applicant must apply. New organizations should submit applications with the understanding that the general practice is to award no more than 50 member slots for new grantees. New applicants are also not eligible to receive fixed amount grants.

AmeriCorps has approximately \$3.2 Million in total funds available for the 2014 AmeriCorps Indian Tribes grant competition. Of that amount, approximately \$1.9 Million will support programs in continuation if they should they be funded at current levels. This leaves \$1.3 Million available for new and recompeting AmeriCorps programs. There is no allocation of a certain number of dollars per reservation or eligible tribe.

3. Do you recommend preparing for a planning grant first before diving into the AmeriCorps grant?
  - a. The 2014 Indian Tribes Notice (*Notice*) is not soliciting planning grant applications. All applicants must submit applications for an operational grant. Availability of planning grants is at the discretion of the AmeriCorps program office upon approval of the CNCS Chief Executive Officer. Planning grants may be offered based on the funding priorities outlined in the *Notice*. An offer of a planning grant will be determined by reviewer assessment of a new applicant's readiness for implementation based on the responses to the selection criteria.
4. If you received a planning grant are you considered a new applicant?
  - a. Yes. Current planning grant recipients will create a new application for a program grant.
5. Can you add more members to your continuation grant?
  - a. Grantees in continuation are allowed to request additional members and additional funds. A request for an increase or expansion may or may not be approved by CNCS.
6. Are leveraged dollars one of the criteria you're looking for?
  - a. Yes, the Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy sections of the *Notice* address how an applicant should respond to the identified selection criteria for leveraged dollars and program matching funds.
7. Is everyone at the Training because they sent in an "Intent to Apply"?
  - a. Attendees of the Tribal Grant Applicant Training were invited because they were current AmeriCorps grantees, planning grantees or had expressed interest in applying for 2014

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AmeriCorps grant funds. A letter of intent to apply is not required for the Indian Tribe AmeriCorps grant competition.

8. For the existing program, the performance measures are streamlined, so do we need to change our program for National Performance Measures?
  - a. If the National Performance Measures align with your program's activities, then CNCS strongly encourages your participation. The National Performance Measures Instructions provide definitions, requirements, and guidelines that will help you determine which are right for you. These instructions can be found on the *Notice* webpage. In addition, the *Notice* describes requirements for performance measurement selection based on the application tier.
9. Should the performance measures for Tribe be based on National measures?
  - a. AmeriCorps programs must have an aligned output and outcome that reflects the program's primary service activity and aligns with the program's theory of change. If the National Performance Measures align with your program's activities, then CNCS strongly encourages your participation. The National Performance Measures Instructions provide definitions, requirements, and guidelines that will help you determine which are right for you. These instructions can be found on the *Notice* webpage. In addition, the *Notice* describes requirements for performance measurement selection based on the application tier.
10. If we create our own, will that weaken the performance measure section of our applications?
  - a. As stated previously, if the National Performance Measures align with your program's activities, then CNCS strongly encourages your participation. Most of our National Performance Measures include aligned measures (an output and an outcome), but in some cases you may need to create your own applicant-determined outcome to measure.
11. Why doesn't CNCS allocate funds based on each reservation?
  - a. AmeriCorps grant funds are distributed on a competitive basis. There is no per-reservation allocation of the funds available for this competition.
12. Is tier 1 priority based on scoring criteria?
  - a. The priority tiers for AmeriCorps programs are based on the national performance measures that a program selects and the percentage of MSY that a program allocates to the activities and interventions of their performance measures. The *Notice* outlines how priority tier is assigned.
13. Will you go over how to calculate MSY performance measure?
  - a. The *Notice* and application instructions provide information for how to calculate the number and percentage of MSY for a performance measure. Additionally, you can find a tutorial on entering performance measures in eGrants on the *Notice* page of the AmeriCorps website.

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14. Is there any place other than eGrants to see the performance measures?
  - a. The performance measures are listed separately at the end of the *Notice* and performance measure instructions can be found on the *Notice* page of the AmeriCorps website.
15. Is there an external review of our applications?
  - a. There is not an external review process for this grant competition. The review process for the Indian Tribes grants is outlined in the *Notice*. Applications submitted by the deadline will go through a compliance review and compliant applications will proceed to CNCS staff for internal review.
16. Last year we submitted a proposal but did not get funded for a planning grant. Is it worth submitting the proposal again?
  - a. This *Notice* is only soliciting applications for program grants. Applicants are not required to have received a planning grant in order to be eligible to receive funding for an AmeriCorps program. We expect the 2014 grant competition to be highly competitive and encourage all interested applicants to submit a grant by the April 30, 2014, 5pm EDT deadline.
17. Is the theory of change the roadmap for designing the grant application?
  - a. A theory of change is a theory (or logic model) for how an intervention can address or solve a stated problem. A theory of change articulates a problem, a proposed intervention, and the change (outcomes) that is expected to result from delivering the intervention. Underlying the theory is a set of assumptions, supported by evidence, about why the intervention is likely to lead to the outcomes. A Logic Model means a well-specified conceptual framework that identifies key components of the proposed process, product, strategy, or practice (i.e., the active “ingredients” that are hypothesized to be critical to achieving the relevant outcomes) and describes the relationships among the key components and outcomes, theoretically and operationally.
18. Do I need to provide supporting documentation for the need that my program will address in my community?
  - a. An application must provide evidence of the need, which is the data that demonstrates the extent or severity of the need in the target community.
19. Do I need to describe what the research on my program’s intervention showed, how it was conducted, etc.?
  - a. Evidence-basis/evidence-informed refers to a program’s demonstration of support that a particular intervention will lead to the intended outcomes and address the identified community problem(s). Evidence for the intervention could include results from research, performance

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data, or results from a similar, successful program and would provide the basis for decisions about the design, frequency and intensity of the proposed intervention.

***As of 3.25.14, the Notice has been amended to include this additional information about evidence of the intervention for applicants:***

**Evidence Base:** In this section, applicants shall provide a description of the studies and evaluations conducted that provide evidence that the proposed intervention is effective for the proposed population and community challenge. This section must include specific citations of studies and/or publicly available evaluation and research reports.

The evidence presented by applicants will be scored and placed into one of the four tiered evidence levels described below:

**Pre-preliminary evidence** means the applicant presents evidence that it has collected quantitative or qualitative data from program staff, program participants, or beneficiaries that have been used for program improvement, performance measurement reporting, and/or tracking. An example could be gathering feedback from program participants following their service year.

**Preliminary evidence** means the applicant presents an initial evidence base that can support conclusions about the program's contribution to observed outcomes. The evidence base consists of at least 1 non-experimental study conducted on the proposed program (or another similar program that uses a comparable intervention). A study that demonstrates improvement in program participants over time on one or more intended outcomes OR an implementation (process evaluation) study used to learn and improve program operations would constitute preliminary evidence. Examples of research that meet the standards include: 1) outcome studies that track program participants through a service pipeline and measure participants' responses at the end of the program; and 2) pre- and post-test research that determines whether participants have improved on an intended outcome.

**Moderate evidence** means the applicant presents a reasonably developed evidence base that can support causal conclusions for the specific program proposed by the applicant with moderate confidence. The evidence base consists of 1 or more quasi-experimental studies conducted on the proposed program (or another similar program that uses a comparable intervention) with positive findings on one or more intended outcome OR 2 or more non-experimental studies conducted on the proposed program with positive findings on one or more intended outcome OR 1 or more experimental studies of another relevant program that uses a similar intervention. Examples of research that meet the standards include: well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental studies that compare outcomes between the group receiving the intervention and a matched comparison group (i.e. a similar population that does not receive the intervention).

**Strong evidence** means the applicant presents an evidence base that can support causal conclusions for the specific program proposed by the applicant with the highest level of confidence. This consists of 1 or more well-designed and well-implemented experimental studies conducted on the proposed program with positive findings on one or more intended outcome.

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For all studies presented by applicants to meet the four evidence levels above, reviewers will examine:

- a) how closely the program model evaluated in the studies matches the one proposed by the applicant;
- b) the methodological quality of the studies presented (e.g., statistical power, internal and/or external validity, sample size, etc.);
- c) the recency of the studies, with a preference towards studies that have been conducted within the last six years;
- d) strength of the findings, with more weight given to findings that show a large and persistent positive effect on participants.

20. When will the application be opened in eGrants?

- a. As of 3.20.14, eGrants is now open for applicants to create their applications.

21. Will continuation applicants need to revise theory of change or performance measures?

- a. Grantees in continuation are not expected to make revisions to their approved program design; however a grantee may request program changes in the continuation application. Program changes must be approved by CNCS. The continuation instructions identify what information a grantee must provide. Additionally, program officers may request that grantees revise or explain performance measure information during clarification.

22. Would it be a problem if you had 2 different applicants serving the same community?

- a. AmeriCorps will not award two different grants for the same project; however two applications from the same entity could be funded to serve the same community if it is clear that the proposed programs are distinct.

23. If planning grantees want to duplicate/replicate existing programs but not overlap, how much research should they do to not duplicate services?

- a. Any applicant should describe how they are meeting an unmet need by providing evidence of the need, and address the selection criteria, ensuring that they are not duplicating services readily available to the target population.

24. Is there a required number of performance measures?

- a. AmeriCorps programs must have an aligned output and outcome that reflects the program's primary service activity and aligns with the program's theory of change.

25. Can we provide a table in the narrative to support stats? To make it more clear?

- a. eGrants requires all information be submitted in a narrative form. Charts, graphs, pictures or information in other formats is not supported within the eGrants system. The only additional information to be submitted with your application is the required logic model, organizational chart, and evaluation or evaluation plan (if applicable).

26. What is page limit of application?

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- a. The page limit for the application narrative is 15 pages. This includes the 424 facesheet for the application but does not include the performance measures or the budget. The logic model and organizational chart are submitted separately and are not included in the 15 page narrative limit.
27. Is organizational chart due when the application is submitted or after?
- a. All application documents are due prior to the 5:00 EDT, April 30, 2014 deadline. The entire application must be sent to [americpsgrants@cns.gov](mailto:americpsgrants@cns.gov).
28. Would the reservation be the service location if that's where the member is trained?
- a. The service location is the place where members will conduct the majority of their service activities or spend the majority of their terms of service. In some cases the reservation may be the service location. The service location will depend on the program model, and it will be up to the applicant to make that determination.
29. How do you define recruitment/retention of members?
- a. AmeriCorps expects that programs will recruit the number of applicants it needs to enroll individuals as AmeriCorps members for each member position awarded to a successful applicant. 100% enrollment is the expectation for each program. Of the individuals enrolled in a program as AmeriCorps members, it is expected that the highest percentage possible will be retained, exit the program successfully and receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award. Programs should strive for 100% retention and/or the highest possible retention rate. AmeriCorps expects that programs with less than 100% enrollment or retention will address their deficiencies and institute correct action plans to improve in those areas.
30. How and when can we recruit mid-year? Can we use different slot configurations?
- a. Each AmeriCorps program is unique and enrollment periods vary depending on how the applicant has designed the program. Some programs recruit and enroll all members within the first couple of weeks of the service year, while other programs may enroll members throughout the entire year. Programs may also have distinct enrollment periods, one at the beginning of the year and one at the program mid-point.

It is the responsibility of the program to recruit individuals to serve as AmeriCorps members and the program has the option of using more than one member slot type in order to meet its community needs. Some programs use a mix of full-time and less than full-time members.

31. What is the limit on number of AmeriCorps terms someone could serve?
- a. AmeriCorps members may not serve more than four (4) terms of service with an AmeriCorps State and National program (this includes programs awarded under the Indian Tribes Notice of

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Funding), regardless of whether those terms were served on a full-, part-, or reduced part-time basis. Additionally, AmeriCorps members may earn up to the value of two full-time education awards and have seven years from the date they earned each award to use it.

32. Why aren't convicted murderers and registered sex offenders allowed to serve as AmeriCorps members?

- a. CNCS sponsored programs are required to conduct criminal history checks on national service participants. Individuals who have been convicted of murder or who are registered or required to register on National and/or State sex offender registries are not eligible to serve as AmeriCorps members. The criminal history requirements and additional resources can be found on the National Service Knowledge Network on this page: <https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/national-service-criminal-history-check-resources>

33. What is my current Program Officer's role in the review of my new grant application?

- a. If your grant is in continuation, your current program officer will review your submitted application. If you are a planning grantee or you are recompeting for a new three-year grant, your current program officer may or may not be involved in reviewing your application. Therefore, you should write your application as if the reviewer has no knowledge of your proposed program.

34. Is transportation part of the budget (to transport teachers, students)?

- a. Transportation is an allowable grant expense. Program expenses must be reasonable, allowable and allocable. Thus the applicant must make the case that the expense is necessary.

35. Is there a minimum number of members that we can request?

- a. There is no minimum number of members you can request; however applicants must demonstrate how the proposed program is cost effective.

36. How do applicant's charge administrative costs to the budget of an AmeriCorps grant??

- a. Administrative costs are general or centralized expenses of the overall administration of an organization that receives CNCS funds and do not include particular project costs. These costs may include administrative staff positions. For organizations that have an established indirect cost rate for federal awards, administrative costs mean those costs that are included in the organization's indirect cost rate agreement. Such costs are generally identified with the organization's overall operation and are further described in Office of Management and Budget Circulars A-21, A-87, and A-122.

Applicants choose one of two methods to calculate allowable administrative costs – a CNCS-fixed percentage rate method or a federally approved indirect cost rate method. Regardless of the option chosen, the CNCS share of administrative costs is limited to 5% of the total CNCS

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funds actually expended under the grant. Additional information about this can be found in the Application Instructions.

37. Will there ever be training just for financial staff?

- a. CNCS has training for financial staff. In addition to financial management workshops during the annual Grantee Symposium, many tutorials and resources for financial staff are available on the National Service Knowledge Network, <https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/ameri-corps-financial-grant-managment>.

38. How many times can we modify the budget?

- a. CNCS does not expect programs to make frequent changes to their budgets over the course of a program year. Budget modifications of less than 10% of the total budget do not require an amendment, however if a program is engaging in frequent changes or making a modification of more than 10% of the total budget, the program must contact CNCS and receive approval to make the change through a grant amendment.

39. Rental Space – How does the Corporation view rental space cost to the grant?

- a. Rental space is an allowable cost if it is reasonable and necessary for the grant. Please use caution when charging it as match, if the space is normally free for use it may not be counted as match.

40. How long does it take to enter the information required under the *Notice*?

- a. The public reporting burden for this information collection is estimated to average 80 hours per submission, including reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing the application in eGrants.